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ABSTRACT

This study examined the altruistic motivations of nine white, female preservice teachers who spent one semester tutoring English Language Learners (ELLs) of Mexican origin. Data were collected via classroom observations and discussions about their teaching aspirations, the children they tutored, and their own racial identity. Results indicated that although the participants were devoted to children and education, generous with their time, and struggling to share their honest feelings, the deficit thinking that was entangled with their own whiteness pervaded all aspects of their contact with, beliefs about, and expectations for the ELLs of color they tutored. The students they tutored were disadvantaged by the influences of whiteness on their tutors. The paper argues that whiteness is an amalgamation of classism, deficit thinking, and racism that privileges the dominant white group and disadvantages everyone else. The whiteness that affected the study participants continuously worked to draw their attention away from the children's academic needs, instead centering their efforts on usurping the authority of parents, modeling abstract social behaviors, and trying to "save" the children from families and lives they completely misunderstood. (Contains 92 references.) (SM)

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Entanglements of Altruism, Whiteness, and Deficit Thinking:
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"You are saved," cried Captain Delano, more and more astonished and pained; "you are saved: what has cast such a shadow upon you?"
Melville, quoted by Ellison

Introduction

In a recent teacher education class I was instructing, a Latina student asked her classmates why they had decided to pursue careers in teaching. Although the class was primarily populated by Latinas, the four White students were the first to answer. Smiling broadly, Tammy[1] volunteered that, despite its heavy workload, teaching was fun, challenging, and rewarding. Lisa added that teaching was a way to creatively and lovingly influence children for the better; Autumn emphasized how much she loved children. Tammy then leaned forward and, with an air of intimacy, explained that she had always loved school, that she loved her teachers, and that she wanted to perpetuate the cycle for the next generation of children. At this point, a Latina finally entered the conversation; responding to Tammy's comment, Irene stated that she wanted to be a good bilingual teacher to replace the terrible teachers from her own school experience.

While it is commonly asserted that many people enter the teaching profession for altruistic reasons such as those presented above by Tammy, Lisa, and Autumn (see Bastick, 2000; Chandler, Powell, & Hazard, 1971; Ethington, 1987; Fox, 1961; Goodlad, 1984; Karges-Bone, 1997; Lortie, 1975; Serow, 1993; Sharp & Hirschfield, 1975), Gordon (2000) points out that the few people of Color who do enter the profession often share Irene's clear purpose of changing the system so children of Color do not have to endure school experiences as negative as their own. This is a sharp contrast to the intentions of many White teacher education students who hope to reproduce their own successful school experiences. It is possible that many of the experiences that worked for the White students are just those that did not work for their classmates of Color (Haberman & Post, 1998).

With all of its shortcomings, the K-12 school system generally works for most White students. 91.2 percent of White Americans 18 to 24 graduated high school in 1999 (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999b). Asian Americans graduated at an even higher rate of 94 percent. However, only 83.5 percent of African Americans of the same age graduated high school and this was the case for just 63.4 percent of Latina/os (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999b). The many Latina/os who do graduate high school often share stories of terrible teachers and educational struggles (see Garcia, 2001; Gordon, 2000; Marx, 2000; Rose, 1989). Moreover, as Gordon (2000) notes, negative educational experiences, accentuated by memories of overcrowded, dilapidated schools and uncaring, stressed-out teachers, contribute to the decisions of many college-educated people of Color to reject the teaching profession altogether. Today, people of Color account for just 12 percent of the teacher workforce nationwide (Ladson-Billings, 2001). In this, the beginning of the 21st Century, the teaching

FL027347

profession is largely White, at 88 percent (Ladson-Billings, 2001), and largely female, at 72 percent (Súarez-Orozco, 2000). Moreover, just three percent of the teacher population is estimated to be fluent in a second language (Darling-Hammond & Sclan, 1996).

The homogeneity of the teacher workforce is a vivid contrast to the diversity of the American student population, of which children of Color now account for more than 40 percent (Garcia, 2001; Lara, 1994). Latina/o children alone account for 13.8 percent of the total American school children population (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999b). This number is expected to grow to 21 percent by 2015 (Garcia, 2001). It is also predicted that children of Color will account for 70 percent of the school-age population by the year 2026 (Garcia, 2001). Enmeshed with these numbers is the quickly growing populace of English language learners (ELLs) who presently account for about five percent of all American school children (National Center for Education Statistics, 2001).

In contrasting the intentions of future teachers like Irene with those of Tammy, Lisa, and Autumn, different experiences, intentions, and motivations regarding education clearly emerge. It is likely that those who share the experiences of their students of Color and their ELLs will have some intuitive advantage over their colleagues whose experiences are radically different (Delpit, 1995; Haberman & Post, 1998; Marx, 2000; Trueba, 1998). It must be noted, however, that teachers of Color do not automatically share these experiences; a teacher's color cannot guarantee that she will be an excellent teacher for all children. Experience, rather than race, likely creates these powerful connections (Haberman & Post, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 1994). However, by simple default, people of Color are more likely to share many of these experiences with their students (Haberman & Post, 1998). These experiences and connections may explain some of the differences between the altruistic, somewhat generic, desires of many White teachers to "help all children" and "have high expectations for all children," and those more specific desires of many future teachers of Color who plan to "help my students get to college." While the former intentions are certainly admirable, it is these latter intentions that more likely produce tangible results.

This Study

This study is an examination of the altruistic motivations of a group of nine White, female preservice teachers who spent one semester tutoring ELLs of Mexican origin. This study is part of a larger project that was undertaken to examine the teaching beliefs and racial identities of the same group (see Marx, 2001; Marx & Pennington, in press). All of these women, whose ages ranged from 20 to 35, were students at a large, selective research university in the Southwest, and they were all enrolled in the teacher education class I was teaching at the time, "Second Language Acquisition." Each participant volunteered to talk with me outside of class about her aspirations for teaching, the child she tutored, and her own racial identity. All interviews with participants were casual, open-ended, and reciprocal (Frankenberg 1993; Henry, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1989; Oakley, 1981; Schultz, 1997). In addition to our conversations, which lasted from three to 10 hours over many sessions during the semester, I also observed each participant tutoring once, collected their tutoring journals three times (Black, Sileo, & Prater, 2000; Collier, 1999), and tutored an ELL myself (Henry, 1998). I also informally observed and talked with participants before, during, and after the class we shared twice each week.

Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) and Critical Race Theory (CRT) together make up the theoretical framework that guides this study. CWS posits that, rather than being "neutral" or "raceless" (Dyer in Chennault, 1998), Whiteness is a socially constructed ethnic category, replete with "unearned privileges" (McIntosh, 1988/1997, p. 291), that influences the worldview of

Whites. Defining White racism as "a system of advantage based on race" (Tatum, 1999, p. 7) that consistently benefits Whites, CRT maintains that "racism is an integral, permanent, and indestructible component" (Bell, 1992, p. ix) of American society. This combination of theoretical constructions allowed me to examine the ways in which participants' White identities influenced the beliefs they constructed about the children they tutored. It also enabled me to examine Whiteness as a construction that is necessarily, if often times unconsciously, linked to racism (Helms, 1990). Thus, as I examined the ways in which Whiteness influenced the participants in this study, I also examined the ways in which they were influenced by, and perpetuating, racism. The contradiction between the altruistic intentions of participants and the biases, paternalism, and White racism that characterized their contact with their tutees emerged as a significant theme in this study. The ways in which Whiteness contributes to this contradiction is the theme I will explore in this paper.

Participants

I opened this study to any female Second Language Acquisition student who felt that she was a White American and, in doing this, got a first-hand look at the socially constructed nature of race (see Chabram-Dernersesian, 1997; Frankenberg, 1993; Lopéz, 1995; Nakayama & Krizek 1999; Omi & Winant, 1986, 1994; Rodriguez, 1998; Scales-Trent, 1997; Twine, 1997). Three participants, Rachel, Michelle, and Amy, felt they had dual White and Jewish identities. Gen explained that "my mother is half Mexican, and my father is White, I guess if you want to classify them" (Interview No. 1 with Gen). She then emphasized that, "I don't really consider myself anything. If I have to, I am White." The remaining five participants, Ashley, Becky, Megan, Clair, and Elizabeth, were not used to classifying themselves as White but felt that they fit no other racial category. As Elizabeth explained, "I'm still... a White girl. Basically. I mean, I don't look diverse" (Interview No. 1 with Elizabeth). In addition to being White, all participants were monolingual in English. Moreover, while Gen described her background as working-class and Michelle described hers as upper middle-class, every other participant considered her economic status to be middle-class.

The Limitation of Whiteness

Like the participants in this study, I too am a White woman from the middle-class and these characteristics shape and limit my understanding of the world as well as my perspectives in the study presented here. As a White female educator researching White female future educators, I am what Foley (1998, p. 116) calls a "cultural insider." This researcher positionality offers the benefits of having many shared life experiences with participants and the limitations of a perspective that is not objective. My Whiteness and my commonalities with my participants necessarily shape and limit my own vision of the issues I present here. I can be critical of my perspective, but I cannot shed it because it permeates every aspect of my life and, necessarily, my work. Thus, the findings I present here are not "the truth," but my interpretation of the situation.

Altruistic Intentions

Serow (1993) defines altruism as "a concern for others at the expense of one's own interests" (p. 198). Using this definition makes establishing altruism extremely difficult, as Serow notes. How can one determine "at the expense of one's own interests"? The Webster's New World Dictionary (1999) offers a similar definition: "Unselfish concern for the welfare of others; selflessness." The "selflessness" part of this definition reserves the term for acts of heroism or martyrdom: acts that usually remain outside the realm of one's paid profession, not teaching. For this reason and others, researchers such as Joseph and Green (1986) and

Lieberman (1956) have been skeptical of the term "altruistic" when describing teachers. Rather than casting aside the term altogether, in this paper I choose to emphasize the strong "concern for the welfare of others" part of the definition rather than the "selfless" part. In particular, I focus on the desires of participants to "help."

The nine participants in this study, like many teacher education students, were thoughtful, lovely young women who loved children and ardently wanted to "help" others. Several of them emphasized that relatively low salaries would not dissuade them from a career they considered highly respectable and rewarding. Many of them had wanted to be teachers their entire lives. Others came to teaching as a "calling" that pulled them away from other paths. Gen, for example, had entered our teacher education program in her mid thirties. She explained that volunteering in her daughter's classroom had made her realize that,

> I need to do something that is fulfilling, that I can give back. I have all this to give and I need a way to give it. For me, teaching was a way that I could give myself and help others. That is pretty much how I came to my decision to be a teacher. (Interview No. 1 with Gen)

Although they came to teaching through different courses of life, most participants expressed feelings very similar to Gen's.

Helping

While all professions benefit society in some way, few professionals site a desire to help others as a major motivation behind their efforts. Teacher education students, in contrast, talk about their desires to "help" all the time. The participants in this study were no exception. Becky, for example, passionately explained that, "I just feel for kids. And I think that if we can help children when they are... young, they will be better citizens when they are older" (Interview No. 1 with Becky). Clair emphasized that, "I love helping others. I love it. Knowing that I am helping them is the best part" (Interview No. 1 with Clair). Similarly, Megan explained that, when teaching, "I feel like I'm really helping ... I like that aspect of it" (Interview No. 1 with Megan). Rachel actually described herself as "into helping," and said that her main reason for joining this study was her desire to help me (Interview No. 1 with Rachel).

Although all participants expressed strong desires to help others, it was Michelle who articulated this desire most frequently and most vigorously. She explained that helping was very important to her because her family routinely "gives up our time and our money to help out other people, which I think is a great charitable thing to do" (Interview No. 1 with Michelle). While she was growing up, Michelle and her family had spent many years tutoring and otherwise helping several people, including a family who had immigrated from Russia. As she explained, "My family did adopt a Russian family. We had a Russian Jewish family when I was much younger, and when they came to America we were their first friends and we basically took care of them." Growing up, Michelle had spent quite a bit of time with ELLs and her relationships with them were primarily characterized by helping.

The Exacerbating Effects of Language, Color, and Economic Status

Although Michelle had more experiences with ELLs than many other participants, nearly all participants adopted her motherly approach to ELLs as they spent time with their tutees. All tutees were children of Mexican origin from low socioeconomic backgrounds; all of them attended segregated schools where children of Color predominated (see Donato, Menchaca & Valencia, 1991; Trueba, 1998) and most children received free or reduced-price lunch. Nearly all of these schools were located to the east of the highway that served as the town's racial divider. People of Color predominated in the East side and Whites predominated in the West

side. For this reason, most participants had never been in any of the neighborhoods where these schools were located before this tutoring assignment. Amy's comments describe what most participants were feeling at the time,

> Driving...this probably sounds so bad...but driving up to the school, the area made me a little nervous; but then it was ten o'clock in the morning. I know – me, personally, I wouldn't want to be in that area at night time. (Interview No. 1 with Amy)

Clair also expressed some common sentiments when she related her amazement at being called a "White girl." As she said, "One of the students that I tutor at Johnson Elementary – she kept calling me 'White girl.' I was like, 'No, well, yes I am. But I have a name.'" Here she started to laugh. I asked her if she felt flattered by this attention to her Whiteness. With big eyes, she gasped, shook her head, and exclaimed, "No! I was kind of *stunned*"[2] (Interview No. 4 with Clair).

As these incidents show, participants were not tutoring children in a vacuum and they knew it (see Marx & Pennington, in press). The social, economic, and racial differences between themselves and their tutees colored every one of their interactions. The longer they spent time with the children, the more their own Whiteness and its related privileges were revealed (Marx & Pennington, in press; McIntosh, 1988/1997). These revelations initially made participants uncomfortable because they were not used to thinking of themselves as advantaged. In order to stem some of the guilt they felt about these "moral dilemmas associated with being White" (Helms, 1990, p. 58), participants became even more determined to help. However, in trying to do this, their own privileges and their own Whiteness continually got in the way (see Brandon, in press; Thompson, in press).

Becky, for example, sought to understand where her tutee was coming from by joining her policeman boyfriend on one of his regular night patrols around the East side of town. During this outing, the policeman and his partner broke up fights, taunted a drunk Latino, and gave Becky a tour of crack houses. Becky was deeply affected by this excursion and passionately explained that,

> These kids come from *hard* neighborhoods.... It's just... a mess. So far removed from everything I grew up with. It's just so poor and so destitute that... I feel sorry for those kids! They have to battle at home and they go to school and deal with that and they don't have any help at home. (Interview No. 3 with Becky)

In her efforts to better understand the child she was tutoring, Becky learned more about the dominant White power perspective towards people of Color who live in low socioeconomic neighborhoods. The differences between her own life and the lives of the people she observed from a patrol car were starkly illuminated and then reinforced by the comments of her boyfriend. Through this perspective, Becky saw people of Color as even more disadvantaged and challenged than she had realized (see Brandon, in press). Rather than finding any commonalities with the people, events, and places she observed, she found a deeper, wider chasm between herself and these "others." This experience prompted Becky to reify Whiteness as the normal state of affairs and to mark the situations she observed as wrenchingly abnormal and deficient.

The Entanglement of Altruism, Whiteness and Deficit Thinking

While she lost sight of the humanity of these "other" people she observed, Becky clearly saw the humanity of her tutee. After her patrolling experience, her desire to help him intensified. She became very protective of Miguel and began thinking of herself as more of a much-needed parent figure than a tutor (Semali, 1998). In fact, she became somewhat competitive with Miguel's mother, explaining that, because his mother spoke Spanish, she was not capable of

helping Miguel in school. After relating the story to me, she sadly concluded that, "The parental, you know, aspect of it is missing" and emphasized once again how "sorry" she felt for the child (Interview No. 2 Becky). Through their weekly tutoring sessions, Becky felt that she was able to do more good than any other adult in Miguel's life.

Becky was certainly not alone in this way of thinking. Most participants took on a parental role to some degree. Megan, for example, explained that she wanted to volunteer in an inner city school after graduation in order to help,

> Black – mostly Black families – or Hispanic [with] a lot of kids, single parents [who] live in bad, bad neighborhoods. Which is totally all the stereotypes, and I know that it's not all like that, but I know some of it is… I think it would be hard… but, I think I could [do it]. (Interview No. 2 with Megan)

Megan went on to explain that children reached by volunteer programs usually missed the support that comes from "good families." Thus, she felt that teachers could make an especially strong impact on the lives of inner city children, children who were quite frequently Blacks, Latina/os, and ELLs from low-income backgrounds. The privileges associated with Megan's Whiteness were subtly illuminated as she expressed not only her desire, but her ability, to "help" these future students with whom she had shared not one day of real lived experience.

Through these words and stories, it became clear that most participants tended to view the children they tutored through a lens marred by stereotypes, misjudgments, and deficit thinking (see Brandon, in press; Valencia, 1997). When comparing the imagined lives of their tutees with their own, most participants felt very sorry for the children. Indeed, many of their classmates who did not participate in the study expressed similar concerns about their tutees. One student, for example, raised her hand to cautiously ask how she could ask the child any questions about his home life without embarrassing him. Because so many of her classmates eagerly awaited my response to this question, I know that many students shared her concerns. Economic class, personal experiences, English language monolingualism, and the students' experiences as part of the dominant racial group in America together "define[d] the tacit standards from which specific 'Others' [were then] declared to deviate" (Semali, 1998, p. 183). That is, in contrast to their own lives, the lives of their tutees seems tragically deficient.

Role Models and Saviors

In order to help "correct" the "deviance" and deficits that they imagined in the lives of their tutees, most participants began to construct themselves as valuable role models the children could look up to and strive to be like. As Rachel said, "I want to really make a difference in children's lives. I would like for kids to be able to see me as a role model, especially in an environment where they may not have anyone to look up to" (Email Contact with Rachel 1/22/01). Through their good examples, participants imagined that the children could pick up the habits and characteristics that would make them as successful as the participants themselves. In this way, they might be able to "save" children from their circumstances. This improvement project was exceedingly rewarding for many participants in the study and they approached it with much enthusiasm.

Michelle, for example, wrote in her first tutoring journal that, "I felt as if I were doing a real 'MITZVAH' (the Hebrew word for good deed). I was really helping the world" (Michelle's Journal Entry No. 1)! She was thrilled the first time she worked alone with Valerie, and convinced that, "Her English seemed to be improving, as well as her self-esteem" (Michelle's Journal Entry No. 3). Several of Michelle's classmates shared these same phenomenal results after just one quick lesson. However, while Second Language Acquisition students had very

large hearts, they had very little teaching experience and their results were suspect. It takes a very good teacher, as well as an excellent learning environment to truly produce such spectacular results (see Chamot and O'Malley; 1994; Fillmore, 1989; Hudelson, 1994; Krashen and Terrell, 1983). As I read journals, listened to class discussions, and observed tutoring sessions, I surmised that students were reacting to two different phenomena: the generous affection of loving children and the subtly illuminated privileges of their Whiteness. After all, no participant ever specifically outlined the skills, training, or background that enabled her to be a superlative instructor and role model. When contrasting their own situations to the imagined circumstances of their tutees, most participants felt that they did not need any special skills or training. Their kindness, their "good" upbringings, and *their willingness to tutor children commonly perceived to be "at risk"* were qualifications enough. That is, rather than teaching skill, participants relied on their Whiteness to guide them.

The deficit thinking that made up the "deep structure" (Brandon, in press) behind these feelings came through when participants talked about their desires to help. Rachel, for example, explained that her stepfather was her role model for working with people of Color. As a shop owner in a dilapidated African American neighborhood, he retained all his employees when economic times were tough, despite the profits it cost him. Rachel shared that her stepfather was so loved by his employees that they would say, "God bless you Mr. Merwin" whenever he passed by (Interview No. 4 with Rachel). She told this story to illustrate the selfless altruism that characterized her stepfather's contact with people of Color and to provide an example of the kind of relationship she would like to have with "people who are *demographically* different from me and my friends" (Interview No. 1 with Rachel).

Although she did not hear it her own words, what also comes through in this story is the power imbalance between the "altruistic" helper and the downtrodden person in need of help. Rachel's comments lend credence to Semali's (1998) assertion that, "The ideologies of Whiteness are best understood in the context of power relations" (p. 186). In Rachel's scenario, her stepfather was a kind and selfless man who helped others at his own expense. While this is certainly true on some levels, this scenario also belies the economic benefit Mr. Merwin must have gained from operating a store in a low-rent, low-wage district. Moreover, it also reveals an understanding of people of Color as a collection of people who could not survive without the help of a White benefactor. In telling this story, Rachel highlighted the gratitude the people felt for a man whom she portrayed as a savior. As she does this, she subtly acknowledges his "superior" (Semali, 1998, p. 186) qualities over those of a group of people unable to help themselves and emphasizes her own desires to be just like him.

Michelle expressed similar views about power and deficiency when she talked about the eventual economic success of the Russian immigrant family her parents had "adopted" in their early years in the United States. When she was growing up, her father helped Mr. Iatskevitch with his résumé and her mother helped Mrs. Iatskevitch put her household together and pursue her American professional credentials. However, once Mrs. Iatskevitch attained her credentials as a medical doctor, the family soon established a high socioeconomic position. This change of social position unsettled Michelle. Trying to explain the betrayal she felt, she emphasized, "They are high rollers. [The daughter] drives a BMW. They have a Corvette. I mean *we* helped *them* when they came here. Now *look at them*!" (Interview No. 3 with Michelle). In a scornful voice, she went on to explain that,

> [My mother] said it made her feel good... and inferior at the same time. It made her feel good because we *helped* them out when they got here. *We* did something that ended up

> as a success. My family helped them. And she said it also made her feel inferior because these people came with nothing. They are already steps ahead. Not *steps* ahead, I mean, they are such high rollers. They live in this gorgeous, exotic house.... I mean it's *unbelievable* to her.

Michelle and her family's alternating feelings of support and scorn for the people they helped show that they expected the Iatskevitchs to maintain their low socioeconomic position and their dependency on Michelle's family indefinitely. Once they no longer needed help, they were constructed as traitors of sorts, "high rollers" who overstepped their boundaries and did not respect the implied power difference between themselves and their "helpers."

Like Rachel's story above, Michelle's depiction of her family's relationship with the Iatskevitchs is characterized by acts of kindness. Only when she talks about the Iatskevitchs' substantial economic success does the power imbalance and paternalism that characterized her families' relationship with them come through (Semali, 1998). Tellingly, Michelle initially described her family's role as one of possessive benefactor, saying, "We *had* a Russian Jewish family when I was much younger" [emphasis added] (Interview No. 1 with Michelle). Because of their lack of social power during their early years in the US, the Iatskevitchs can be viewed as initially lacking some of the "unearned privileges" (McIntosh, 1988/1997, p. 291) usually bestowed on Whites. When they gained economic success, English fluency, and independence from their benefactors, the privileges of Whiteness were eventually secured. This evolution in their status points to both the relationship between Whiteness and power (Semali, 1998) and the socially constructed nature of Whiteness (Chabram-Dernersesian, 1997; Frankenberg, 1993; Lopéz, 1995; Nakayama & Krizek 1999; Omi & Winant, 1986, 1994; Rodriguez, 1998; Scales-Trent, 1997; Twine, 1997).

The deficit thinking underlying Clair's beliefs about her tutee manifested itself somewhat differently than it did with other participants. Looking around the tutoring room, she was surprised that all the tutors were White while all the children being tutored were people of Color. Trying to make sense of this situation, she pondered,

> Your color doesn't make you smarter than the other, so that's one thing that I noticed that I just thought was kind of interesting. I'm kind of curious as to why there aren't more... other races helping. I don't know. I just took note of that. (Interview No. 2 with Clair)

Through these words, it is clear that Clair associated "helping" with the altruistic, charitable endeavors of good citizens. Because she rarely saw people of Color giving of themselves in this way, she wondered if perhaps they were not as kindhearted as Whites. By doing this, she attributed selflessness, helpfulness, and intelligence to the White helpers as she simultaneously attributed selfishness, neediness, and a lack of intelligence to the people of Color being helped and to the people of color absent in this helping effort. These kinds of characterizations have been used to describe the differences in virtue between Whites and people of Color since the time of slavery in the United States (see Davis, 1995; Franklin, 1751; Omi & Winant, 1986, 1994; Takaki, 1990). Although these depictions of Whites and people of Color have long been refuted (see Foley, 1997; Valencia, 1997; Valencia and Solorzano, 1997), as Clair's words illustrate, they still linger in our contemporary culture.

The Suffusion of Whiteness

As these several incidents show, the time study participants spent with children and other people of Color worked to slowly illuminate and vaguely outline the usually invisible privileges of their Whiteness. No participant, at this point, could specifically point to the privileges that her Whiteness gave her because the concept remained abstract; however, nearly all of them could see

that their tutees did not share the same combination of advantages they did. Discussing those more cognizant of their White positionality, Semali (1998), describes the reaction to illuminated privilege as the recognition of a "moment of failure" (p. 186) when White educators ask themselves, "What can I do? How can I go about changing oppression and domination in my classrooms...?" Because participants had only a vague notion that their Whiteness was the source of their privileges, they came to the question "What can I do?" but then followed it with, "How can I change my students to help them better fit into the system?" and "How can I give the children the love they are not getting from anyone else?" Instead of critiquing their own role in this oppressing and dominating system, they sought to reproduce the dominance of Whiteness by reproducing the status quo.

Sleeter (1992a) would describe these philosophies as a combination of the "teaching the exceptional and culturally different" and the "human relations" approaches to multicultural education. Both these approaches are meant to boost the self-esteem of children by helping them to "fit in" and "make it" in society. Sleeter notes that many new teachers are drawn to these approaches because they seem like easy solutions to classroom struggles. However, these approaches are problematic because they do not question the racial and cultural equity of White teachers working with children of Color, the education system as a whole, nor the larger society. No matter how well-intentioned they might be, these approaches are, in reality, "deficit model(s) of distributive justice [where] the emphasis is on having what all others have" (Brandon, in press). Quoting Gale and Densmore (2000, p. 12), Brandon explains that many new teachers interpret the "inequality imbalance" they see as a "[call] for action 'to compensate (or normalize) disadvantaged individuals.'" Sleeter (1992a, 1992b), Brandon (in press), and Gale and Densmore (2000) all point out that such approaches to equity necessarily rely on understanding children through a thick deficit lens. Putting it succinctly, Brandon (in press) adds that, "Deeply embedded notions of deficit thinking continue to pervade both our pedagogy and our curriculum, ensuring that certain children *cannot* learn in U.S. schools."

Indeed, many participants in this study, at this point, were misinterpreting children, losing patience with them, and putting roadblocks in their way while all the while maintaining their "altruistic" goal of "helping" children in need. Michelle, for example, nearly smothered her tutee with hugs, affection, and praise while Valerie read out loud. However the moment the child stepped away, Michelle turned to me and put her down for having such "poor" English and for talking like "a Mexican" (Observation of Michelle). Rather than focus on Valerie's reading skills, she focused on the child's Spanish accent and occasional use of nonstandard English. As someone with more ESL training than Michelle, I could tell that Valerie was reading strongly at her grade level. Thus, as a learner, she was having no obvious problems in this thirty-minute lesson. However, her clothes were more Mexican than American in style, her accent was more Spanish than English, her skin was darker rather than lighter, and her school was in a low socioeconomic, racially segregated part of town far from the dividing highway. Valerie did not look or sound like a typical White American child. Thus, although her out loud reading skills were quite strong, Michelle only noticed her "deviance" from her own, more "normal," standards and experiences (Semali, 1998).

Observations of Rachel evidenced similar inconsistencies. When first describing the children she tutored, she explained her impression that, "They are growing up just like everybody else and it was nice to see" (Interview No. 1 with Rachel). When I asked her to explain what she meant by this, she said,

> They were just excited to be at school and not the stereotypical... "They don't care." One of them was talking about going swimming – he had a pool. I was pleasantly surprised. They were very well behaved.... These kids seem like they come from great homes.... It didn't seem like they were living on welfare and can't do anything and, you know, can't afford this and can't afford that. I don't know if that's what I expected or not, but I was really excited when I left there. [The teacher] really put me with great kids. They seem well brought up.

As Rachel explained here, she was "pleasantly surprised" that the kids did not fit the negative stereotypes she had associated with English language learning children of Color from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Most of her comments above relate to the perceived social class of the children. They seemed middle-class and this surprised her. When I met the kids they were dressed in a typical "middle-class" American style with neat polo-style shirts and tidy khaki pants. Moreover, their school was situated in a somewhat less racially segregated, working-class part of town closer to the dividing highway. Aside from their skin color and Spanish accents, they did not appear to be very different from their few White American classmates.

While Rachel emphasized how "pleasantly surprised" she was at this elementary school, just a little questioning moved her right back to a reliance on deficit thinking and stereotypes. I asked her what predictions she could make about the children's educational futures based on her contact with them. She responded by noting how hard working the kids were and how much their teacher seemed to care about them. However, she paused for a moment and then explained that she did not really know anything about the families. Although they appeared to be "good," the one time she assigned the children homework, they forgot to turn it in. Based on this incident, she surmised that their parents might not value education. Although she had just praised the families for raising the kids so well, she was still willing to believe that they might not care about education. Moreover, despite her positive experience with the kids being so "normal" (Interview No. 2 with Rachel), throughout the study, Rachel continually emphasized how rewarding it was to work with children who "may not have anyone to look up to" (Email Contact with Rachel 1/22/01). She could not shake off her deficit views no matter what evidence she found to the contrary.

Conclusions

Valencia and Solorzano's (1997, p.198) proclamation that "deficit thinking is alive and well in the contemporary period" somehow understates the problem. The statement is not alarming enough. It does not terrify educators, parents, and children, although it should. The nine participants in the study were lovely young women devoted to children and education. They were generous with their time and they struggled to share their honest feelings during this study. Later, they tried very hard to better understand their Whiteness and mitigate its effects on their beliefs and attitudes (see Marx, 1991; Marx and Pennington, in press). However, as this study shows, the deficit thinking that was entangled with their own Whiteness pervaded all aspects of their contact with, beliefs about, and expectations for the ELLs of Color they tutored for one semester. The tutees were unfairly disadvantaged by the influences of Whiteness on their tutors.

In this paper, I have argued that Whiteness is an amalgamation of classism, deficit thinking, and racism that privileges the dominant White ethnic group and disadvantages everyone else. The Whiteness that affected the nine young women in this study continuously worked to draw their attention away from the children's academic needs and, instead, centered their efforts on usurping the authority of parents, modeling abstract social behaviors, and trying

to "save" the children from families and lives they completely misunderstood. Thus, their efforts to "altruistically" "help" the children, in fact, hindered the academic progress of the children. The results were just the opposite of what participants intended. While just nine White women participated in this study and any extrapolations to the larger society must be made with caution, the feelings they shared and the experiences they had with their tutees seem typical of the hundreds of White teacher education students and teachers with whom I have worked in many different parts of the country. The problems associated with the overwhelming Whiteness of the teacher workforce is endemic in our system. It is a plague.

We education researchers, teacher educators, teachers, school administrators, and parents must now ask ourselves some hard questions. Are we satisfied with the present system that continually erects obstacles in the educational paths of our ELLs and students of Color while it simultaneously congratulates us for our "charitable" efforts to "help?" Are we willing to accept the fact that nearly forty percent of our Latina/o children may continue to drop out of high school (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999b)? Are we content with the idea that people of Color are over represented in special education classes by as much as 33 percent (Artiles, Harry, Reschly & Chinn, 2002)?[3] When people of Color account for the majority of the American population, as they are predicted to do by the year 2015 if current trends continue (Garcia, 2001), will many of us still be shaking our heads and wondering why our children struggle without stepping back to take a look at our own contributions to their toils? When examining these questions, we must also ask ourselves if we are willing to recognize that many of our efforts to "help" are, in fact, exacerbating the educational struggles of a large proportion of our children. After all, while the achievement gaps between Whites and Latina/os and Whites and Blacks narrowed somewhat in the 1970s and 1980s, in the 1990s the gap began to widen again (Lee, 2002). Are we going to let this trend continue? Are we willing to reverse this trend even if it requires taking some of the blame deficit thinking usually loads onto the backs of our students and their families?

My experience working with teacher education students, teachers, and university colleagues leads me to believe that many of us *are* willing to ask these questions and to explore the possible, painful answers. Many of us truly do have a sincere "concern for the welfare of others" (Serow, 1993, p. 198) and we truly do want to "help" our students. Once it is brought to our attention, many of us are willing to recognize that Whiteness and White racism do negatively affect our interactions with children of Color and ELLs (e.g., Bergerson, in press; Brandon, in press; Cochran-Smith, 1995, 2000; Hytten and Warren, in press; Marx, 1991; Marx and Pennington, in press; Paley, 1979; Scheurich, 1993; Scheurich and Young, 1997; Sleeter, 1992a, 1993, 1996; Thompson, in press). Once we recognize the ways that Whiteness influences our perspectives and actions, many of us are willing to make changes in our own mindsets and those of our students. However, many of us also become quite fluent in the language of Whiteness and White racism without really taking ownership of our own roles in the perpetuation of these terrible constructs of inequality as Hytten and Warren (in press) and Brandon (in press) point out. We talk about the racism of our students, the teachers we observe, and the abstract institutions of education and society. We also eagerly point out the racism we see in the work of one another. However, as we do this, we too often turn examinations of Whiteness and White racism into theoretical gymnastics that never make their way out of the ivory tower and thus have little impact on actual schooling (Sheets, in press).

In light of this, more action must certainly be taken. The impact of Whiteness and White racism on education must be examined further. More care must be taken to explore these

constructs and raise discussion of them with future and practicing educators. However, "feel good" approaches to these difficult subjects that distance educators from their own connections to Whiteness and White racism are not the answer. Such approaches perhaps inadvertently – perhaps intentionally – tend to placate Whites as they help them/us glimpse the influences of the dominant culture in very superficial ways that mistakenly affirm Whiteness rather than problematize it (Thompson, in press). The goal is not to help Whites become even more comfortable with their/our privilege.

However, neither is the goal to alienate Whites from exploring their/our own ties to inequality because the explorations are so painful. Bringing up Whiteness and White racism with practicing and future educators almost necessarily leads to "feelings of guilt, depression, helplessness, and anxiety" (Helms, 1990, p. 59). If not approached cautiously, these feelings can overwhelm Whites, causing them/us to retreat from all explorations of Whiteness and White racism (Helms, 1990). An even more disturbing reaction to these overwhelming feelings can be the generation of White resentment toward people of Color, a phenomenon that Omi and Winant (1994) have described as a "backlash" against what are misunderstood to be the inherent privileges of being born of Color. Winant (1997) notes that this way of thinking actually represents "Whiteness as a *disadvantage*, something which has few precedents in US racial history" (Winant, 1997, p. 42). Thus, examining Whiteness in ways that terrorize Whites has serious repercussions that, in the end, also work against the struggle toward education equity.

So what are sensitive, altruistic, and highly motivated educators to do? We must keep exploring the issues of White racism and Whiteness and their implications for the education of ELLs and children of Color. We must ensure that the difficult conversations we raise are difficult but not overwhelming. We must also be careful not to give the impression that there are easy answers to these complex issues. Neither we, nor our students, can resolve the problem of education inequity quickly, no matter how much we would like to do so. The notion that easy answers exist to difficult, complicated issues merely serves to mask those real issues and push them further away from the light of day (Brandon, in press; Marx, 1991; Thompson, in press). Moreover, as we ask these difficult questions and help our students move forward, we must also be careful to continually inform our own understanding of these issues so we can offer our students much-needed guidance along the way (Titone, 1998). At the moment, it is certainly a fact that none of us have all the answers to these questions.

Future Research

With that said, much more empirical work needs to be undertaken on the effects of Whiteness and White racism in education (Marx, in press; Sheets, in press; Sleeter, 2001). At this point, most research on Whiteness in education focuses on theoretically defining the parameters of Whiteness (e.g., Kincheloe, Steinberg, Rodriguez & Chennault, 1998; Thompson, in press) and examining displays of Whiteness among small groups of teacher education and university students (e.g., Hytten & Warren, in press; Marx, 1991; Marx & Pennington, in press; McIntyre, 1997). Very little empirical research has been conducted in this area and even less has been conducted in actual K-12 environments with working teachers, with a few notable exceptions such as the works of Sleeter (1992, 1996) and Obidah and Teel (2001).

Because Whiteness remains the neutral racial and ethnic category in this country, "White people [generally] do not see themselves as White" (Katz & Ivey, 1977, p. 486). Because of this neutral sense of "racelessness" (Dyer in Chennault, 1998), few Whites find it easy to talk about their "Whiteness." Moreover, racism is usually characterized as an exceedingly negative ideology embraced most often by hate groups, not the general White public (Tatum, 1999).

Thus, most Whites try to distance themselves from any notion of a White identity and any semblance of racism. Because of this distance, Whiteness and White racism are usually revealed in subtle, rather than obvious, ways. Consequently, assessing the effects of Whiteness and White racism on educators and their students proves to be difficult to quantify. In light of this difficulty, studies that use multiple methods of data collection and ethnographic studies that portray a holistic picture seem best suited for examinations of Whiteness and White racism in education. Moreover, longitudinal studies that follow new teachers through their teacher education programs and into their own classrooms for several years are needed to help assess whether attention to Whiteness and White racism in schools of education has any eventual impact on actual teaching.

As these recommendations suggest, the road to transforming schooling into an institution that enhances the education of the ELLs and children of Color who presently struggle is long and difficult. However, the many of us who do sincerely want to make these changes can recognize this "moment of failure" on our parts and then ask ourselves "What can [we] do" (Semali, 1998, p. 186)? Exploring and acting on the answers can be our best contributions to changing the present situation.

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[1] All names of people and schools are pseudonyms.

[2] Italicized words in participant comments represent the stress they gave particular unless otherwise noted.

[3] Artiles, Harry, Reschly, and Chinn (2002) argue that the ways in which "overrepresentation" is measured must be better understood and further examined.

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